

Nova Scotia Regional Committee
Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment
Law Amendments Committee Submission Re Bill 57

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on this very important Act.

My name is Laurette Geldenhuys. I am a doctor working in the laboratory at Nova Scotia Health (NSH) and Dalhousie University, in Halifax, speaking on behalf on the Nova Scotia Regional Committee of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE NS).

<https://cape.ca/about-us/>

Our mandate is to promote sustainability, including by reducing waste and energy use, in NSH; and to advocate for climate action, to improve and preserve health in NS and beyond.

As physicians we are encouraged by the support the new government is showing for health care in NS.

We are particularly encouraged by much of the content of the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act which exceeds both the previous Sustainable Development Goals Act, and the NS Conservative Party platform on climate action.

We hope that it will be swiftly passed and implemented.

We also hope that it may be strengthened by the incorporation of suggestions provided in the analysis by the Ecology Action Centre, which we carefully reviewed and fully endorse.

https://ecologyaction.ca/sites/default/files/images-documents/EGCCRA%20EAC%20Analysis_0.pdf

On September 6, 2021, 233 international medical journals including The BMJ, the Lancet, and the New England Journal of Medicine, called on governments to take 'emergency action to tackle the "catastrophic harm to health" from climate change.'

<https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n2177>

The leading medical journal, the Lancet, calls climate change 'the greatest global health threat facing the world in the 21st century, but' ... also ... 'the greatest opportunity to redefine the social and environmental determinants of health.'

Their most recent annual climate and health report, published in October, 2021, where 120 leading experts from 43 collaborating organizations examined 44 indicators, 'exposed an unabated rise in the health impacts of climate change, and a delayed and inconsistent response of countries around the world.' The report states that 'the

imperative is clear for accelerated action putting the health of people and planet above all else.'

<https://www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate>

In addition to positive global effects for decades to come, climate action in NS will also have immediate local health benefits.

<https://cape.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Climate-Change-Toolkit-for-Health-Professionals-Updated-April-2019-2.pdf>

Electricity generation and transportation are by far the two biggest contributors to NS's GHG emissions at 42% and 31% respectively, and a source of air pollution. Air pollution is one of the most significant risk factors for premature death in Canada, with 14,400 deaths annually attributable to air pollution.

Replacing coal, not with liquid natural gas or biomass, but with renewable energy sources, will not only significantly reduce our GHG emissions, but also immediately reduce illness and death from respiratory and cardiovascular disease, cancer and premature birth, and the associated burden on the health care budget; enabling resources to be diverted to other health care and social needs. This must go hand in hand with immediately ending development of fossil fuel extraction, and fossil fuel subsidies; and redirecting resources to support workers in these industries to transition to employment in the renewable energy sector.

Electrifying transportation in general, and providing green efficient public transportation in particular, will further reduce GHG emissions, air and noise pollution, and traffic congestion; and support vulnerable populations.

Increasing safe active transportation (walking and biking, instead of driving) will similarly reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, cancer and vehicle-related death, and improve mental health.

Supporting local food production and consumption, with an emphasis on foods of plant origin, and a healthy food program in schools will improve food security and health, particularly for children from vulnerable communities.

Preserving wilderness, and increasing access to green spaces will have a variety of health benefits. Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, reduce heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes, improve respiratory health, and improve response to cancer therapy, and is associated with longevity.

<https://www.parkprescriptions.ca/en/whynature>

A survey published on September 14, 2021, in the journal Nature, asking 10,000 16- to 25-year-olds in 10 countries how they felt about climate change and government responses to it, found that most respondents were concerned about climate change, with nearly 60% saying they felt 'very worried' or 'extremely worried'. Many associated

negative emotions with climate change, using words such as 'sad', 'afraid', 'anxious', 'angry' and 'powerless'. Overall, 45% of participants said their feelings about climate change impacted their daily lives. This is partly caused by the feeling that governments aren't doing enough to avoid a climate catastrophe.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02582-8>

Strong government climate action will reduce this mental health burden that NS youth are also experiencing.

Medical school curricula are increasing planetary health content to equip physicians to navigate the health effects of the climate crisis. Increasing planetary health education in all NS schools at all levels, and in public education, will improve understanding and the ability of all members of society to participate in the positive changes needed to secure and improve our futures.

Nova Scotians have a long history of heroism and resilience in the face of disaster.

On December 6, 1917, just after 9 AM on a clear winter morning, the largest ever non-atomic explosion on earth, shook the granite foundations of Halifax, killing almost 2,000, and injuring 9,000 men, women and children, in a city of just over 60,000 inhabitants. The survivors, aided by others across Canada and North America, immediately sprang into action, offering themselves, their homes and their possessions up to respond to the disaster, caring for the injured, the hungry, the homeless, and the orphaned, rebuilding Halifax with lasting improvements in housing, and founding the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nova Scotia has been a model to the world in our solidarity, resulting in some of the lowest infection and highest vaccination rates in the world, led by first the liberal and now the conservative provincial government, and public health experts, side by side.

We hope that in the climate crisis, the greatest of all threats yet to our community, and to the world, bold climate action by our government, informed by climate scientists, will be effective here in Nova Scotia, and make us an example to the world through our collective action.

The members of CAPE NS are keen to support the government's climate action in any way we can by sharing information on the inextricable relationship between climate and health.